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HD **BC NDP appoints director to oversight body for alliance with Greens; Donna Sanford will be responsible for resolving disputes between the BC NDP and Greens**

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WC 946 words

PD 16 July 2017

SN The Globe and Mail (Breaking News)

SC GMBN

LA English

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VANCOUVER --

Without the support of the BC Green Party, there would be no provincial NDP government being sworn into power this week – a reality that makes Donna Sanford's new job especially critical.

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Ms. Sanford, who previously worked as a policy analyst with the provincial climate action secretariat, has been named executive director of the newly created confidence and supply agreement secretariat in the office of premier-designate John Horgan. She will be responsible for managing the relationship between the incoming minority NDP government and the three Green MLAs, and will be guided by a written agreement signed by the two parties several weeks after the spring election.

BC NDP transition spokesperson Carole James said Ms. Sanford's main job will be to extinguish disputes before they flare up into trouble.

"Dispute resolution was put in place for disputes," Ms. James said, referring to measures set out in the agreement to avoid conflict before it begins. "We hope we never get to that place of needing a dispute-resolution process."

Andrew Weaver, leader of the BC Greens, agreed. "We don't want to use a dispute-resolution mechanism because we want to work through the secretariat," he said. "The secretariat provides an ability to come to consensus."

Mr. Weaver said he will continue with regular weekly meetings with Mr. Horgan. However, he described those talks as "much more high level," while Ms. Sanford's work will be "nuts and bolts" of linkage between the meetings.

Ms. Sanford will work in the premier's office, meaning taxpayers will be covering her salary. The New Democrats declined to say how much Ms. Sanford will be paid, whether she will have any additional staff, or the size of the new secretariat's budget. They said those details will come out later, once the party has transitioned into government. The arrangement has already drawn the ire of the Liberals, who will formally return to Opposition this week after 16 years in power.

While the two parties have agreed to work together, effectively ending 16 consecutive years of BC Liberal government, there are divisions between the NDP and Greens on a range of issues.

They include the fate of the Site C hydroelectric dam in the province's north, changes to the labour code around unionization and road tolls.

The written agreement includes what a dispute-resolution process is, but in reality the measures set out focus entirely on consultation, including commitments to work together on policies, legislation and appointments by cabinet. There is no mechanism set out in the agreement to arbitrate disputes; the parties' main leverage would be the threat of one of them walking away from the deal.

The BC NDP declined to make Ms. Sanford available for an interview, instead putting forward Ms. James, a veteran MLA and former party leader herself. Ms. James, who is likely to be appointed into cabinet on Tuesday, said Ms. Sanford's responsibilities will include ensuring the Greens are kept informed on legislation, and have opportunities to give input. "Having one person responsible for that ensures that that work gets done," Ms. James said in an interview. "It's time management. It's relationship building. It's policy work. It's a combination of all of those things. It's a critical position."

Ms. Sanford is a good fit given her work on the environment, said Ms. James. Also, she has worked with Liz Lilly, currently chief of staff to the Green's leader, Mr. Weaver. While the Greens were not consulted on Ms. Sanford's hiring, Mr. Weaver said he was pleased to be working with her. Indeed, he said Friday he has already been in touch with ideas on bringing in legislation on ride-sharing.

"Mr. Sanford clearly has a wealth of expertise in the area of climate so there's a lot of interaction with some of my interests," Mr. Weaver said, adding that he expects she may also end up being a point person for Liberal issues.

Ms. Sanford's LinkedIn profile indicates she has been working in the B.C. environment ministry since 2000. She is a graduate in agricultural sciences and community and regional planning from the University of British Columbia. Ms. Sanford is the sister of Glen Sanford, who was deputy director of the NDP's recent election campaign and is currently vice-president of the party. She is also the daughter of former North Island MLA Karen Sanford.

BC Liberal MLA Andrew Wilkinson dismissed the secretariat as wasteful. Instead, he said the NDP and Greens should spare taxpayers the expense of managing the relationship between the two parties by having Mr. Horgan and Mr. Weaver take on the responsibility. "It's totally unnecessary and demonstrates an arrogance that they think it's appropriate for the public to be paying the wages of people to manage the relationship between two political parties," Mr. Wilkinson said in an interview. He said he hoped the distinct budget of the effort would be broken out for review, and not rolled into the budget for the premier's office.

Ms. James said the NDP, Liberals and Greens will still have house leaders to deal with the day-to-day operation of the legislature. The NDP concluded, however, it needed an agent for "deeper consultation" as promised in a confidence agreement between the NDP and Greens.

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